

SKENE (A. J. C.)

THE RELATION OF MEDICAL SOCIETIES

TO

PROGRESS IN SCIENCE.

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# INAUGURAL ADDRESS

OF THE

PRESIDENT

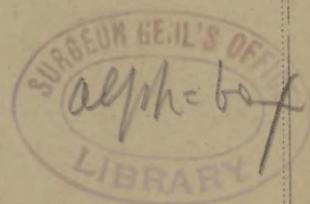
OF THE

Medical Society of the County of Kings.

NEW YORK,

ALEX. J. C. SKENE, M.D.,

JUNE 16, 1874.



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## A D D R E S S.

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GENTLEMEN,—

With the intention of fulfilling part of the duties attached to the office which I hold in this Society through your kindness, I propose to discuss briefly the relation of medical societies to progress in science. The subject chosen is certainly one of considerable importance, and I trust its consideration may meet your approval.

In dealing with this question, I hope we shall form a correct estimate of the true status of the profession, which we in part represent,—its weak points as well as its strong ones, and how far it has claims upon the respect and confidence of the public. If this object is accomplished, we shall more clearly comprehend the position of medical organizations to professional advancement, and may therefore entertain a surer hope of making true progress.

The medical profession is anything but a homogeneous body, consisting as it does of men of every degree of natural ability, education, and social culture. A few devote their time to medicine through love of the science; some practice the art to benefit mankind; and a great many, it must be conceded, heal the sick in order to make a living. All of them, doubtless, desire to see the medical profession stand first in the estimation of the world, most powerful in its influence, and accomplishing the greatest amount of possible good to humanity. Take the profession as a body, its record is worthy of all admiration.

When we consider what has already been done by the profession to improve the physical condition of the human family, we might be tempted to rest satisfied with past achievements, and to trust to the future for the further development and growth of the science and art of medi-

cine. There is enough in the monuments raised by past genius to interest the most profound mind, and to please the vainest of men. But in spite of our rich inheritances, there is plenty of work to be accomplished by those who desire to leave the science of medicine better than they found it. While we glory in our present strength, and point with pride to the knowledge which has been accumulated from previous ages, we cannot close our eyes to the heap of rubbish, in the shape of ignorance, which remains to be swept away, in order to bring to light the hidden truths within our reach.

The more we know, the more readily we perceive that discoveries the most important remain to be made; and we need men with talents, time, and opportunity to make them. And what is likewise essential, we need a more general and better knowledge of what is already established as truth in the science of medicine. We need more men prepared by education and practical training to master the *science* of medicine before they practice the art. If the ranks of the profession were filled by the right material, the public would soon learn to estimate us at a higher value than they do now. As it is at present, men succeed financially in practice, while exhibiting an ignorance of their profession which, if displayed in any art or trade, would lead to bankruptcy and the degradation which it deserved. Sinners in the profession prosper, while the righteous can hardly earn their bread.

Believing that a general and thorough education of all who seek to enter the profession is the surest way to effect true progress, I propose, in a brief way, to discuss the ways and means by which this reformation can most surely be effected.

There are three avenues through which progress must come :

1. Through the medical schools.
2. Through legislation by the people.
3. Through the profession, as individuals and in societies.

The public and the profession naturally look to medical schools for all that pertains to medical education. They

trust, or have trusted, to these institutions for all required progress and reformation in teaching. An examination of this matter will show at once what the schools have accomplished in the past, and enable us to judge what we may expect of them in the future.

As regards our present educational system, it is true that a good education may be obtained by any one who has sufficient courage and perseverance; but it has to be acquired under most trying difficulties.

When we consider how the science of medicine is taught, we cease to wonder that the education of medical men is so bad, and are surprised that it is so good as we find it. In spite of existing circumstances, a few superior minds manage, by great perseverance, to acquire a good education; but thousands are allowed to enter the profession who are most inexcusably ignorant. The result is, that we find the most thoroughly educated and scientific physician practising alongside the greatest medical boor, who is not only ignorant of medicine, but sadly deficient in general culture. If the number of well educated men in the profession predominated, the unqualified few might be carried along without much harm to the profession or the public. It must be confessed, however, that the superior men are in the minority. Were these errors being corrected by a better education of medical recruits, we might hope that present troubles would rapidly disappear in the march of progress; but we fail to perceive any reliable signs of improvement.

The system of medical education all over the world is little better now than it was a century ago. While the stores of medical knowledge have vastly increased, the methods of imparting it to students have been well-nigh stationary. In this country, where we boast of all modern improvements, and are indignant at the slightest hint of being behind any of the older countries, our medical schools, it must be confessed, are as bad as in any other part of the world.

Any capable observer, examining for the first time the ordinary medical curriculum, would certainly conclude that it could only be undertaken by students thoroughly pre-

pared by a previous liberal education. A student is unable to satisfactorily study medicine without possessing at least the rudiments of a good academical education. In all civilized nations, except America, the student, before he is permitted to enter a medical school, must give satisfactory evidence that he has the required preliminary knowledge. It is certainly not to the credit of the schools of this country that no such qualification is asked. The most illiterate and uncultured can take his place in the medical school alongside the most highly educated scholar. And, what is still worse, men are admitted to receive the degree of Doctor of Medicine on exactly the same terms. It is a notorious fact, that hundreds of men graduate in the medical schools of this country who, from want of elementary education, would not be permitted to begin the study of medicine in Great Britain or Germany. This statement applies to all the schools in the country: at least I know of no exception. I am inclined to think that, as a rule, the more prosperous the school the less particular they are about the *quality* of the student. To the well educated and cultivated medical student, it is discouraging and humiliating to be classed amongst a number of men who could hardly rank with the scholars in a primary school.

Professor Huxley, in an address quite recently delivered at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland, said, speaking of medical education:—"I hold as strongly as any one can do, that the medical practitioner ought to be a person of education and good general culture; but I also hold by the old theory of a faculty, that a man should have his general culture before he devotes himself to the special studies of that faculty; and I venture to maintain, that if the general culture obtained in the faculty of arts were what it ought to be, the student would have quite as much knowledge of the fundamental principles of physics, of chemistry, and of biology, as he needs, before he commences his special medical studies."

Because this country is considered a land of political freedom, men claim the liberty to study medicine with or without reference to preliminary education. But the laws or liberties of a country cannot change the fact, that a man

can make little or no progress in science with a mind untrained to study. The knowledge acquired under such loose ideas of "freedom" is sure to be of a superficial kind, and allows a man to be easily led away from standard truths, while he is ready to accept every new theory as shallow and shadowy as the minds that conceived them.

The question naturally arises here, as to the amount of preliminary education which should be required of the applicant for medical honors. This is a subject I do not intend to discuss here, and it is one that would require to be decided by the voice of the whole profession. Some insist that a degree of Bachelor of Arts should be the standard; but this is impracticable, there being no standard for this degree itself, so that it may mean much in one place and very little in another. Whatever the maximum may amount to, we should at least demand that the medical student come prepared with a sound knowledge of English, sufficient acquaintance with the classics to enable him to understand scientific nomenclature, and grounded to some extent in the elementary principles of natural philosophy.

On a subject like this, where all are agreed as to the propriety and necessity of having educated men to fill the ranks of the profession, it surely will not be difficult to devise the means, when we once set ourselves to it. But till something definite is done in this direction, we cannot expect due progress or reformation in the science or art of medicine.

We have sins both of omission and commission in medical education. We use no efforts to secure trained men, and then we compel those who come forward to study under the most disadvantageous circumstances. The law in the majority, perhaps in all medical schools, ordains that the candidate for medical honors must study medicine for three years under a legalised doctor of medicine; and that he shall attend two full courses of lectures in a duly authorised school. These rules are faithfully insisted upon, and are very seldom violated. Whatever benefit the schools and preceptors may derive from this law, so far

as the student is concerned it is in general a failure and an imposition.

The system of studying under a practising physician, as usually carried out, places the student in the most trying position to acquire knowledge. Men in active business have no time to teach, even should they possess the requisite knowledge, which they often do not. A man may be a successful physician, and yet make a very poor teacher. There *are* men possessing the necessary qualities for teaching and practising, but in my opinion they are the exception, not the rule.

The usual way in which the student occupies his three years with his preceptor is somewhat as follows:—If the young man has means, he is permitted to occupy the office; and while the doctor is attending to business, the student, with a few books and bones, is left to educate himself, if he is so inclined. Occasionally in the afternoon and evening, the doctor may take the trouble to ask a few questions.

Another class, and the more fortunate of the two, engage a preceptor, and then teach school or work on a farm perhaps, going once a week for recitation.

When students are thus practically left to themselves to get their education as best they can, why should the law compel them to employ and pay for preceptors? The student is obliged to study so long and pay so much, but the preceptor is not bound to give any specified time to his work, nor impart any given amount of instruction. Instead of demanding a certificate of mere attendance on a preceptor, would it not be much wiser and more beneficial for all concerned to find out by some test what the student knows, irrespective of where he acquired his knowledge? In Great Britain the law demands that the applicant comes up to a certain standard before he is registered as a medical student; but it allows him to get the knowledge in the way most congenial to his taste or most suitable to his means.

If we turn our attention to the mode of teaching practised in the medical schools, very little sign of progress will be observed. The student is required to attend two

full courses of lectures, each course being less than six months in duration. Thus in one year he is expected—his preparatory education having been obtained as we have seen—to learn anatomy, physiology, chemistry, and all the sciences which together make up the education of the physician, surgeon, and accoucheur. The time specified for the work to be done is ridiculously inadequate, even if the plan and methods of instruction were perfect, which is far from being the case.

The most unreasonable methods of education are practised in medical schools. The instruction is almost wholly given by lectures, which are attended by students at all stages of progress—the youth just beginning his studies and the senior about to graduate occupying the same benches. It is difficult to imagine anything more absurd and more unmerciful, than the practice of compelling young men in their first year of medical study to sit six or seven hours a day listening to lectures which they do not understand. It is really a prostitution of mental and physical health and strength, which ought not to be tolerated. No such mixing of all grades of students in one class would be permitted in any other department of education. And yet this erroneous system is not confined to this country, as it exists, with slight modifications, everywhere.

I would not be understood as condemning lecture-room and amphitheatre teaching: they have their proper place in the course of medical study. But every member of the profession must see the objectionable nature of teaching all the branches of medicine by lectures alone. Demonstrative teaching may be best accomplished by lectures in the amphitheatre; and so may the principles of medicine and surgery; but beyond this lectures are a tedious waste of time.

Within the past few years, a kind of sham reform has been attempted in this country, by making great pretensions to clinical teaching. This pretended—not real—improvement has had the effect of reviving the declining interests of many schools; but the actual improvement in teaching amounts to nothing. A considerable increase of

surgical exploits in the amphitheatre, and so-called clinical lecturing, but really lecture-room orations about patients, constitute the improvement in clinical teaching. Now, of all the frauds in medical education, this clinical teaching in the lecture-room is the greatest. Some good comes of it, because the poor thus get the benefit of extraordinary medical skill; but so far as the students are concerned, the system is really injurious.

A surgical clinique, as it is called, generally amounts to this: a patient is brought in, the professor says something about the case, and states the operation which is to be performed; and the more heroic and unusual the operation, the greater the glory of the professor. The operator and his assistants gather around the patient, and the operation proceeds. Here and there a student in the larger class may get a glance at what is going on, but the great majority have to accept the proceedings in blind faith. A student might as well try to learn the art of painting by looking from a distance at an artist at work, as to learn surgery in this way.

The lecture-room method of teaching practical medicine is about the same. It may be an agreeable way of passing time to hear the professor declaiming about cardiac murmurs and abnormal pulmonary sounds as observed in the patient present, but it is not the way by which the student can learn the physical signs of disease.

There are in many schools private tutorial classes, where the student, if he has the inclination and the means to pay extra fees, can get that kind of practical drilling which is necessary. But as this lies outside the bounds of an already crowded curriculum, and not at all compulsory, the harrassed student is very apt to neglect the opportunity.

The reason why these imperfect methods of teaching have existed so long, may be partly due to the natural conservatism of the human mind; but it is chiefly due, I think, to the fact, that the professors are poorly paid for the labor they already perform, and therefore they have little inducement to undertake reforms which would involve more work with no proportionate increase in re-

mumeration. There is nothing in the laws which govern medical schools to render the teachers independent of the students; and the teachers can scarcely be expected to injure their own interests for the benefit of the profession and the public. And then professors are under strong temptation to continue the present lecture system of teaching, as it relieves them of the drudgery of drilling students, which they have not time to do; and they enjoy the *elat* which is awarded to well-delivered lectures.

It seems to me that a serious mistake is often made in the selection of teachers. The schools generally try to secure men of known reputation, and having a popular style of lecturing attractive to students. Now it is a fact, that an eloquent speaker and brilliant operator may be a poor teacher. They may draw students to that school, but if judged of by the progress which pupils make under them, their merit as teachers would be poor indeed. To lecture pleasingly and teach science effectively, are two different qualities not necessarily conjoined.

I am happy to say that there are medical schools in this country, though few in number, in which praiseworthy efforts have been made to raise the standard of education; but it is painful to add, that they have been rewarded by the students going to less particular institutions. Reformation in individual schools, while the general laws remain as at present, is a suicidal policy for those who make the attempt, and can have little effect for good.

We have thus seen, that though urgent reformation in medical education is required, the medical schools, for various reasons, have shown no inclination in the past, and give no evidence as to the future, that the needed reform will be attempted.

We shall now look at the second avenue through which progress might be expected, namely, through legislation by the people. Little need be said under this head, as it is self-evident that our statesmen, as a rule, can have but very imperfect ideas of what the public require in this matter. The influence of the profession with statesmen is not sufficient to guide them correctly in professional matters, unless we are unanimous, and combined in a manner

which will be difficult to procure. The honorable busy practitioner has not time to manipulate legislators; while the tricksters who have an interest in things remaining in their present state of chaos, have both the time and the special qualifications for lobbying to any extent.

This brings us to consider the third direction from which reform may be expected, namely, through the profession, by means of its local organizations. As the members of the profession are the only parties who thoroughly understand the nature of the different points at issue, and as they suffer greatly by the present state of affairs, they ought to have an interest in procuring reform as speedily as possible; and that they have the power to do so, if properly combined, may be taken for granted. Here, as elsewhere, union is strength. As we can expect little or nothing from the schools or the legislature, we must help ourselves. As every town, county, and state has an organization of some kind, their object in all cases being the advancement of the science and art of medicine, it surely would be a quite possible task to get something like united action as regards several points of reform, in reference to which there is little room for difference of opinion.

Assuming, then, that reform must come through the united action of societies such as this, the question arises what special points ought to be aimed at first, and how are they to be attained. Wholesale changes, even if possible, are not always desirable; hence we should only attempt to reform the more glaring weaknesses of the present system, leaving many little improvements to be effected by time.

I think there is no room for difference of opinion in regard to the desirability of all the members of our profession being men of good education. Every sect could stand on that common platform. The manner in which this could be best accomplished, might give rise to some dispute; but I think the simplest and surest, and for which we have good examples in Europe, would be to compel every one desirous of becoming a medical student to pass a preliminary examination before duly authorised boards elected for that purpose, or present certificates from

acknowledged universities, guaranteeing the possessor to have passed examinations equal to those demanded by the medical board. Were this examination put in the place of the present very questionable system of studying with a practitioner of medicine, I have no doubt it would raise the standard of medical students, and prove of benefit to themselves, the profession, and the public. As this preliminary education could be obtained in any way most suitable to the student, he might easily do so while attending to business; and thus the time all but wasted under the present apprenticeship system might be devoted to a more thorough course of training at the medical school.

For this law of preliminary education to be of any value, it must be compulsory, and extend all over the country. It would be of little value if it were in force in the State of New York, while students could escape its enactments by crossing the North River. As it would benefit all the schools alike, and could not be opposed by the smaller sects as oppressive or special legislation, there seems no reason to doubt that it only requires to be brought before the legislature by the unanimous voice of the profession, to be adopted at once as the law of the land.

The next point for reform which I would urge, and which I consider of very great importance, is the relieving of the medical schools of the responsibility of examining and graduating their own students. This is certain to meet with serious opposition from many of the teachers; but I think it could not injure any respectable school, and if it were the means of closing or revolutionizing some of the more questionable establishments, every one would be a gainer in the long run. At present we have a most unwholesome competition in licensing men to practise medicine. If the competition tended to stimulate the schools to produce better scholars and more trustworthy physicians, then it would be valuable; but the tendency is rather to make bids for patronage by making the portals to graduation as wide and easy as possible. Thus there is no uniformity in the value of the medical degree. It matters not where the degree comes from, or what is its

value, the possessor is protected by the law; but the suffering ignorant public have absolutely no guarantee or protection in the fact that the person they employ is legally qualified to affix M.D. to his name.

What is wanted is a well-qualified Examining Board for each State, perhaps, where students from any school, on presenting the proper certificates, would be thoroughly and impartially examined, and granted a degree if found worthy. This Examination Board might be composed of representatives chosen by the different schools, by the local societies, or by the general profession, in any manner which could be agreed upon. The expenses of such a board could be met by the fees of the students seeking examination. They could meet at stated times during the year, in the places most suitable to the majority of the students. By this means, coupled with the compulsory preliminary education, the public would have some guarantee that the possessor of a medical diploma was a person who might be trusted as a physician, without their having any special personal knowledge of the individual. As at present, the only safe way for the public is to look upon every man as a medical rogue until he has proved himself an honest man. In this way the younger members of the profession are seriously debarred from the share of the practice to which they are justly entitled.

It will be objected to a scheme like this, that the teachers of a student are the best judges of his abilities, and best fitted to examine him. There is certainly some truth in this objection; but if the student has been taught the principles of his profession, and not merely the opinions of his teacher, he will be able, in the vast majority of cases, to indicate his knowledge to a proficient examiner whom he has never seen before. Where the examination is partly written, oral, and practical, as it ought to be, he will be an exceedingly nervous student who fails to exhibit his knowledge in each of the departments, if he possesses it at all. The examiners, in many cases, would be chosen from the professors in the different schools, and as a rule be men eminent in some department of the profes-

sion ; and being quite independent of the students, a fair, impartial examination could be depended upon.

Some might object that this method would materially decrease the already insufficient revenues of the medical schools, by depriving them of the graduation fees. This, however, need not result to any serious extent, if at all. The fees paid to the examining board need not be much more than pay the expenses of the members, and that would not be great ; while the present class fees might be raised a little to compensate for any reduction otherwise. But supposing it *did* interfere with the revenues of a few professors, that is a trifling matter compared with the general good of the profession and the public.

There might be a little difficulty in getting some of the smaller medical schools to acquiesce in a movement like this. But there could be no powerful honest opposition on the part of any sect who desired to ensure the protection of the public against ignorant physicians—and every sect *pretends* this is their aim. The anatomy, physiology, pathology, and chemistry of all schools are alike in essentials ; it is chiefly in therapeutics that any difference is to be discerned ; and some elasticity might be allowed on this point by the board of examiners. But it ought to be imperative that all presenting themselves for graduation, whatever theory they might afterwards practise, should be possessed of a safe amount of knowledge in all the essential points in the science and art of medicine and surgery in its widest sense.

Strenuous efforts are being made in Great Britain to accomplish a scheme of reform similar to the above. There they have nineteen different graduating bodies throughout the country, the requirements of the lowest being probably greater than our highest. But to do away with all unhealthy competition, it is contemplated to have an examination board in each of the three kingdoms, composed of representatives from each of the present licensing corporations and the chief medical societies. It is termed the “one portal system,” but does not exclude members of universities from the special honors to be derived from examinations in their different schools.

That we stand in need of some reform of the kind indicated, few will deny. Once the principles of the scheme were adopted, the details would not be a serious matter to settle. By means of such machinery, it would be an easy matter to raise the standard of education year by year, which under the present competitive system is practically impossible. So long as human nature remains as it is, students will most readily flock to the examiners who will give them least trouble ; but were the standard raised, and the student forced to graduate at a Board such as is here indicated, there need be no fear that the requisite number of recruits would not come forward to fill the ranks. It would thin out the idle and the inefficient, and establish a clear line of demarcation between the ignorant impostor and the properly educated physician. This scheme would give the public the only means of making a distinction between the medical sects which it can properly understand, that is, the guarantee of a sound scientific education. It would thus raise the confidence of the public in the profession, and benefit themselves and us. The schools would be restricted to their legitimate function of teaching, and be removed from the temptation to commit the crime of thrusting half-educated men on an ignorant public which trusted them for protection.

If ever the profession obtains this desired power, it must be exercised in a liberal and intelligent manner. They must endeavor to protect principles, not persons ; science, not sects. The spirit of all true law is to legislate for the greatest good of the greatest number ; and I think it cannot be denied but the measures indicated would tend for good to the whole community.

There was, I believe, a move made in the State Medical Society to bring about some reform in medical teaching ; and I trust that Society will be foremost in this good work, as it has been in kindred schemes.

In any attempt at medical reform, the co-operation of the medical press would be of great value ; but unfortunately the proprietors and conductors of such journals are frequently teachers and others who fancy their interests lie in matters remaining as at present. They pro-

bably reason to themselves, that if they preach this reform, and talk as if it were a change the necessity of which was patent to all, they thereby would be accusing themselves of gross carelessness as regards the public interests in times gone by. A man may be willing to accept a new thing readily, but not if such acceptance implies culpability in his previous conduct. However, if the profession generally are determined on reform, the journals will be bound to follow suit if they do not take the van. The contributors and subscribers can soon make their power felt, even in the *sanctum sanctorum* of the most conservative editor.

There are some of opinion, that great advantage would accrue to medical education if the schools were endowed either by the government or by wealthy laymen. But this is an impracticable scheme. It is not at all probable that sufficient funds could be had from private sources; and as our Government treats all alike, the legislature would be as likely to endow bad schools as good ones. It would be a splendid field for political jobbery and pilfering, of which we have already enough, and would not be any real benefit to the profession or the public. There is a wide field for private benevolence in wealthy laymen giving as much as they wish to the present schools and hospitals, to be expended in scientific research or more active charity, as the donors or regents might see best. The only legitimate way of supporting medical schools, is by making the students pay the expenses incurred in educating them, whatever that may amount to.

Some very sentimental folks are afraid that high tuition fees would debar poor but promising young men from joining the profession. Probably it might, in rare instances; but though an occasional genius might be lost in this way, it would be amply compensated by the exclusion of a great number of both poor and unpromising youths, who enter the profession simply because it can be done cheaply, without any regard to their aptitude for performing its duties aright. There need be no fear of the stream which supplies the profession drying up; and our great effort must be, not to cheapen medical educa-

tion, but to enlarge and improve it. The fact that it will take time, money, and hard application to enter the ranks, will sift the recruits and improve the whole army.

Having thus briefly and imperfectly considered the relations of the profession to the education of its members, we shall now glance rapidly at a kindred topic, scarcely less important, namely, the relation of the profession to the education of the public in questions of medical science.

That the great body of the public are lamentably ignorant regarding even the simplest branches of medicine, is an assertion which can not be called in question. Proofs of it abound everywhere. Every one who pays any attention to social science, but more especially medical men, must be aware of the vast amount of misery caused by the ignorant use of drugs, and through belief in false doctrines in medicine. This great evil cannot be correctly estimated or reduced to figures; but, as a public scourge, it may be fairly classed with the unreasonable use of alcohol and tobacco.

Were an intelligent inhabitant of some other planet to take a holiday tour over our continent, he would be apt to think we lived to a large extent on drugs. He would be forced to conclude that the body social, from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot, was "full of wounds and bruises and putrifying sores." He would find every prominent corner occupied by a glaring, gaudy drug store, with not a few between the corners. Every newspaper and periodical he came across would seem to depend for existence on advertising cures. Going along the streets, he would find posters urged upon him by people possessing invaluable medical seerets. Wherever he went, in fact, by horse or steam cars, boat, or foot, he would be continually faced by posters, mammoth or microscopic, detailing the virtues of certain cures. Every rock, tree, fence, gable, roof, pillar, and post seems to be pressed into the service of the drug vendor.

The price which the public has to pay for all this rub-

bish is something simply appalling. The extent to which people permit themselves to be imposed upon by ignorant, audacious business men who deal in drugs, is sufficient to make one almost doubt the sanity of the human race. Even those who manifest ordinary intelligence in all other things, are often victimised by the most superficial deception in medicine. And this general ignorance is displayed in reference to other medical matters besides drugs. How helplessly ignorant most people are in regard to the qualifications of their medical adviser! He is chosen out of many for no particular reason, and lauded as being at the top of the profession, for reasons the most absurd. The most shallow egotist is often considered by his admiring clients as the very embodiment of the medical science of the century. A certain kind of business tact will often succeed where honesty and sound learning will fail.

The ignorance being acknowledged, we may with advantage inquire why it prevails. Doubtless the causes are many. While the ignorance of the masses concerning medical subjects is lamentable, it is perhaps not more so than regards other departments of science; but from its nature, and every-day character, it is more apparent, especially to the medical profession. When we consider the nature of the science of medicine in its widest sense, we cannot blame the public so very severely. Medicine embraces so many subjects, different but cognate, that no one but a specialist, who devotes his whole time to the subject, can expect to be well posted in its details, or even have a correct knowledge of its principles. And then the different medical sects tend to darken and puzzle the non-professional mind. They seem to think that where doctors differ so much, it would not be safe for them to decide, and they lay themselves open to the loudest-talking, widest-advertising medical panderer to popular prejudice, whether he be in or out of the profession.

I am inclined to think that the medical profession is somewhat to blame for the prevalent erroneous notions of the masses regarding health matters. There are few individuals, and fewer families, but come under the charge

of some member of the profession, more or less, during their lives. As a rule, the public reverence their medical adviser, and generally accept without questioning whatever he says. Now, if the medical men who preceded us had faithfully discharged their duty, and instilled into their patients some of the simpler and settled principles of the science, surely we would not have had to meet such gross ignorance as at present prevails. Formerly, and even still to a lesser extent, physicians treated their patients as individuals for whom they were called upon to write a Latin prescription, and give a few directions as to their conduct while ill. The principles which had been violated in producing the sickness, and those involved in the recovery, were looked upon almost as trade secrets, not to be told to the uninitiated. The patient being ill, he must swallow a certain quantity of drugs, and in due course of time he would get well. As a natural consequence, the people got the idea that disease was a battle to be fought with drugs, led on by the doctor; instead of, in the majority of cases, a derangement due to the violation of physiological principles which must be rectified by a different mode of living. Seeing drugs always prescribed, and evidently the chief part of the treatment, they have been led to think that they may sin unhesitatingly, believing that Nature has kindly provided an antidote to save them from the legitimate result of their folly. Who can blame them? Had we not better blame ourselves for inculcating so extensively the idea that drugs and disease were natural born enemies, the antagonism of which might always be relied upon, if the fight were conducted by a man affixing M.D. to his name? If the public had been instructed by precept and example that drugs formed but a subsidiary part of the treatment of disease, they would not thus readily resort to the counter of the drug store for advice, or accept the prescription of the medicine vendor through the medium of the public prints. The profession and the public are thus reaping the pernicious fruit of the seed planted by our physician ancestors; and we must see to it that we do not perpetuate the evil if we cannot eradicate its present fruits.

The question which follows is, how can we atone for the transgression of the past, and avoid all such evils in the future? That the public have a right to look to the medical profession for education in health matters, is as just and proper as that they should look to the Church for instruction in matters theological. We dare not be so inhuman as to try to keep them in darkness, that our fees may be more numerous. Few will credit us with motives so mean; but we should see that "evil is not wrought through want of thought," as well as by wilful negligence.

From the extensive ramifications of the medical profession amongst the people, and the personal character of the connection, there is little doubt that a most potent influence might be brought to bear on society were more pains taken by physicians to instruct their patients and friends regarding the simpler principles in physiology and hygiene. The conscientious and educated practitioner would ultimately be repaid for his trouble, by keeping his patients and their friends from falling so readily into the traps laid by designing men. On the low plane of expediency it would be advisable to act thus; but the higher law, to do as we desire to be done to, makes it imperative on every man who would lay claim to the character of a true scientist.

The universal habit of prescribing medicines has doubtless been the most important means of establishing the popular faith in all kinds of drug specifics and panaceas. Hence, while we bewail the tendency of the public to prefer at times some nostrum to our prescriptions, we have the consolation of knowing that the profession is responsible, to a great extent, for their education.

Next in importance to the personal influence of the profession, is the power they might wield through the press. This is a field which has been as carefully avoided by the regular members of the profession, as it has been sedulously cultivated by the hosts of fraudulent business men who form the vulture-like camp-followers of the regular medical army. Because popular medical literature has generally been written by speculators of the

vilest description, who interlarded their advertisements with sham science, to act as a decoy duck, on this account few respectable men have had the courage to appear in the field, lest they should be confounded with the usual class of "popular physiologists." But this stand-aloof principle is not right. It looks too like the "close-communion" practice of some of our theological friends, and is apt to make the public think we do not wish them to acquire the knowledge they so much need.

There are many health journals for the people in the market, but almost without exception they are issued by one-idea'd fanatics, by those who have some axe to grind or pills to peddle. We have one class, and a very numerous one, who seek to inculcate the idea that man is largely an amphibio-herbivorous animal, that he should use no fluid, outside or inside, but water, and live entirely on fruit and farinacea. Others think that phrenology solves all the mysteries of life, and teach us to carefully avoid carbonaceous food, salt, milk, spices, and live somewhat like Nebuchadnezzar of old. They generally agree that all physic should be thrown to the dogs. Journals such as these, with others specially got up to advertise private business concerns, and almanacs filled with pathology to suit their pills, are what the public have to depend upon to a great extent. In fact, every petty one-thought sect pushes its claims on the public through the press. The regular profession alone, either through Pharisaic self-complacency, carelessness, or callousness, lets the public discover the truth as best they may.

We are clearly acting a foolish part in thus quietly looking on while so many false doctrines are being disseminated. A species of jealousy seems to lie at the bottom of this "masterly inactivity." Each is afraid to move, lest he be accused of self-seeking. To write an article for a journal or a pamphlet on a popular medical subject, is so apt to be looked upon as an attempt to surreptitiously advertise the author, that it is generally avoided. Meantime, the public are being devoured by medical sharks.

It has been suggested that a popular medical journal

should be started, under the auspices of a society such as this, to be conducted on the basis of sound medical science. While this might undoubtedly be useful, I believe that the time and talent necessary for this undertaking would be better employed in endeavoring to reach the masses through the widely-read popular journals which already abound in the country. Special journals, on health or any other subject, are usually very limited in their circulation, and are generally purchased by those who need them least. Were some of our prominent members to write a few articles for a popular periodical, there is not a doubt but they would find ready admission, and would thus reach and be read by the very class most requiring such instruction. Were all the members thus to use their influence on the local journals, and keep the public well posted on the essentials of physiology and hygiene, and expose the false doctrines so assiduously obtruded on the people, incalculable good might be done, both to the public and the profession. I am delighted to see that much of this good work is already being done by *The Sanitarian*, which is fast gaining in favor with the people as well as the profession. I am happy to say, also, that some attention is now being given towards instructing the rising generation in the principles of sound physiology, through the medium of the school-books, by means of carefully-prepared simple lessons. This, aided by simple illustrations from the teacher, cannot fail to be productive of much good in time to come.

And why should we not learn even from our enemies, and have carefully-written pamphlets on various subjects, controversial matters being avoided, that we might leave with or recommend to our patients? It is by means such as these, more than by intrinsic merit, that many of the petty systems manage to push themselves along in the world, at the expense of the public good, and to the serious detriment of the legitimate profession of medicine.

The platform, too, has been as carefully avoided by the profession as in the case of the press. Although every American is supposed to be born an orator, the faculty is

rarely used to teach medical science to the people. The platform is a popular institution in this country, and might be utilised for great good in teaching the masses the laws of health. There is no lack of talent in the profession; but the objection that prevents the press being used is as powerful as regards the platform. Fear of being looked upon as advertising himself keeps many an eloquent tongue quiet, and thus again the public are cheated out of their rights. It is high time we were getting over these petty feelings and jealousies, and appearing before the public in some other light than mere diagnosticians, therapeutists, and surgical operators. We certainly have public duties as well as private ones, and should see that both are properly fulfilled.

I trust ere long to see in this and kindred societies, in addition to the Pathological and other sections, a department of Public Instruction. A committee of this nature, which would see that the local journals were supplied with useful and authoritative articles on health matters, would be productive of much good. Were articles for popular journals and pamphlets endorsed by such a committee, they could be given anonymously to the world with enhanced authority, and without giving rise to any objection on the score of personal advertising. It might also arrange for the delivery of public lectures on Popular Physiology, by the members of the Society, or others. How much more certainly would we benefit the public and the profession by this means, than by warring with narrow sectarians, who only thrive the more on the publicity thus given them.

It would be a matter of some importance, and useful to the public, if we could define exactly the difference between legitimate medicine and what is known as quackery. Not one in a thousand outside the profession has any definite ideas on this subject. Indeed, I have searched our own literature for a well-defined statement of the distinction, but failed to find it, until I heard it in the Oration recently delivered by Dr. Hutchins. Theoretically, the difference is, that the one is educated and honest, the other ignorant and unprin-

cipled. There is a well-marked distinction between the typical representatives on the two sides. One deals in truth and honesty, the other in fraud and trickery. Practically, as we find men mixed in the world, the line of demarcation is not so clearly drawn between the members of the regular profession and the empiric. The honest scientist, who ranks at the head of his profession, bears, of course, no resemblance to the designing, ignorant pretender; but as in zoology it is sometimes hard to say whether a specimen belongs to the animal or the vegetable kingdom, so here there is a borderland where it becomes difficult to accurately determine to which side the individual belongs. There are many in each army near enough to shake hands; and there are not a few in the regular army who would be more at home under the rebel flag.

The only real Doctor in Medicine is the man who duly qualifies himself by a liberal and scientific education, and faithfully exercises all his knowledge to relieve suffering and benefit mankind. He is bound by no theory, sect, or school, but takes the good of everything in science to serve him in his efforts for the amelioration of distress. He is the only true eclectic, seeking aid from every available source. And when he fails, he is ready honestly to acknowledge it.

The man who serves his own interest, on the other hand, has one theory by which he squares all his cases, and one remedy or system of medication, which he applies to "all the ills which flesh is heir to." He generally vaunts his system as infallible, and, however disastrous the result, owns no defeat.

The scientist accepts all truth in nature, and respects it for its own sake. He is ever ready to give up cherished ideas when they are disproved by well-attested facts. Personal reputation and success he sacrifices, whenever that is necessary, to serve the cause of truth and justice. The illegitimist, on the contrary, is ready and willing to sacrifice facts and principles to secure his own commercial prosperity.

The Judas among the disciples of Esculapius is a com-

pound of ignorant credulity, selfish ambition, and brazen deceit. He is the restless spirit of the age, who believes in liberty without law, and strives to obtain knowledge and riches without working for either. Such men are scattered all over the world—thick enough, perhaps, in Brooklyn. Here and there we find solitary specimens, each one claiming peculiar virtue in his special skill. Again we find them combined in leagues or sects, and claiming to constitute a new school in medicine. They discard the facts in science which have been accumulating for ages, and laying hold of some specious theory as a basis for their creed and stock of knowledge, proclaim that they have inaugurated a new era in medical science. Such institutions are exactly like the new schools of art, where they teach painting in ten lessons, and sculpture in the same length of time.

The candid scientist gives a ready ear to all such claims, and weighs well their value. He listens attentively to the Hydropath, who claims all the virtues of the Pool of Siloam for his aqueous applications; and acknowledges that water is very powerful and useful, but is far from being omnipotent in the cure of disease.

He hears of a new school which has for its foundation and superstructure the Shakespearian maxim—

“One fire burns out another’s burning.”

This sect claims that their theory is absolutely true, and that you must reduce your drugs to a minuteness of division far beyond anything dreamed of in the natural constitution of matter. The scientific physician tests this doctrine by actual experiment, and finds it fallacious. It evaporates in his crucible, and leaves scarcely a trace behind. He certainly is justified in believing that either the theory is false, or the observations of its promulgators are wilfully or accidentally incorrect, when he carefully repeats a given number of experiments, and finds the results all opposed to the claims of its exponents. The philanthropic physician regrets that these vaunted discoveries are not true.

The pathologist would be delighted if he could look through the human structure with the eye of a clairvoyant, and see the exact molecule which was out of place, or the changes going on by reason of perverted vital action. The physician would be glad if he could summon the "spirits from the vasty deep" to aid him in the detection and cure of disease; but he cannot accept the statement of the best "medium" without a demonstration of the truth of the doctrine.

The man who has but one theory, one principle in therapeutics, which he advocates under all circumstances, does not belong to the liberal profession of medicine. We have an insignificant few in the world who claim that they constitute several new schools of medicine. They have existed for many years, but they have not added a single discovery, not a single idea to anatomy, physiology, pathology, surgery, obstetrics, or hygiene. All the special science which they possess might be reduced to manuscript, and put into a nut-shell. Their literature consists of a small budget of theories and imaginary facts, put together less ingenuously than an average dime novel.

All these multiform parasites, who live and thrive on the wounds and sores of society, are a great public bane, and the profession regret that they are permitted to exist. They have been attacked with all the caustic at the command of scientists, but still they live and multiply. We might as well leave them alone, and turn our attention to bettering our own position, and enlightening the public, so that imposition may die a natural death, through want of fools to be fleeced. To sweep all the rubbish in medicine from the face of the earth, is a work which can only be accomplished by medical societies. The public cannot do it, and the schools will not. By raising the profession, the non-professional will fall. The weeds will gradually disappear from the garden of life as more attention is paid to the cultivation of good fruit.





